



MAYOR'S OFFICE

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November 19, 2021

Cole Mullis, PE
Mid-Willamette Valley, District 3 Manager
Oregon Department of Transportation
885 Airport Rd. SE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Mr. Mullis,

The City of Salem wishes to celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., by naming a prominent street in his honor. The Salem City Council unanimously initiated this proposal after receiving strong support from members of the public.

The City is proposing that State Highway No. 72, commonly referred to as the Salem Parkway, be named the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway. Salem Parkway is a prominent roadway connecting Interstate 5 with downtown Salem and the nearby State Capitol Mall. This connection from Interstate 5 to Salem Parkway gives this roadway further regional and statewide prominence. City staff have prepared the attached proposal in conformance with the Oregon Transportation Commission's policy on naming facilities (OTC Policy 05, Naming Highway Facilities).

Thank you for your consideration of this important request. Please let me know what additional steps are necessary for us to bring this request forward to the Oregon Transportation Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chuck Bennett". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Chuck Bennett
Mayor

Attachments:

1. Proposal to Name Salem Parkway to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway
2. Oregon Transportation Commission Policy on Naming Highway Facilities, October 15, 1991

Proposal to Name Salem Parkway to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway

The City of Salem is proposing to rename Salem Parkway NE to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway NE. The purpose of this proposal is to highlight the importance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to the Civil Rights Movement in Oregon. There are currently no facilities named for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Salem or within the greater Salem-Keizer metropolitan area.

Salem Parkway NE is a State Highway that provides access from southbound I-5 into the City of Salem, extending approximately three miles from I-5 to the couplet formed by Liberty and Commercial Streets NE. Salem Parkway is classified in the *Salem Transportation System Plan* as a Parkway. The Oregon Highway Plan classifies it as a Regional Highway and an Expressway northeast of Broadway Street NE. The Oregon Department of Transportation refers to this highway as Salem Highway No. 72.

The Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) adopted a policy on naming highway facilities in 1991 (attached). This policy provides guidelines for when the OTC may approve naming a highway facility after an individual. The criteria include:

1. Demonstrated statewide support for naming a facility;
2. The honored individual shall have made a lasting contribution, with a significant and historic impact on Oregon;
3. The honored individual shall have been deceased for at least one year; and
4. The facility is long enough to merit a title, such as a bridge or tunnel more than one-half mile long, or a highway section with defined end-points which was completed as a whole.

The following is a discussion of the significant and lasting contributions made by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Oregon and is submitted in support of the OTC policy.

Oregon's Civil Rights Movement

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. made a lasting contribution to our nation and to Oregon. Dr. King was the nation's most prominent leader in the 20th century's struggle for civil rights. In 1946, the Atlanta Constitution published Dr. King's letter to the editor stating that Black people "are entitled to the basic rights and opportunities of American citizens." In 1948, President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981 to end segregation in the Armed Services. While people in our region tend to think of the Civil Rights Movement as being focused in other parts of the country, Oregon had its own Civil Rights Movement.

The early work of King and President Truman inspired the Oregon legislature to pass its first civil rights law establishing the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) in 1949. Oregon was one of only six states in the nation to have this kind of civil rights protection. Oregon's FEPC elected Ulysses Plummer, the only practicing Black attorney in Oregon, as their secretary. Oregon Governor Douglas McKay stated to the FEPC, "*This is a great experiment. Oregon and civil rights are on trial. So I urge you to do a job that can be looked back upon as a monument to Oregon's farsighted approach to the task of bettering*

*human relations.*¹ Mark A Smith, founder and first President of Vancouver Washington's NAACP, was appointed the Administrator of the Civil Rights Laws in the State of Oregon. Smith was one of the few Black men working in a position of authority in Oregon during this time period. He had come to the Pacific Northwest in 1943 as a radar installer at the shipyards. Smith stated, *"In Oregon we have conceded the right of everyone to make a living regardless of his race, creed or national origin. We must now step farther and give him the right to make more than a living, the right of developing his ability and making his life one of productive and creative pursuit."*²

As a prominent civil rights leader, Dr. King brought his message of integration to Oregon in 1961 in a speech sponsored by the Urban League of Portland. In 1964, the first case testing Oregon's Civil Rights Law was tried in Salem at the Marion County Courthouse. It involved a Black couple who had tried to rent a West Salem apartment but were denied due to their race.³ In 1965, the City of Salem's City Council established the Salem Human Relations Commission in order to improve racial harmony in the city. James Welch, representing this Commission, worked to ensure equal treatment under the Oregon law. In a November 1965 *Capital Journal* article describing an event at a Salem tavern where four Blacks were refused service, Welch stated, *"...the law requires equal treatment in bars cafes and other public places...."*⁴ In 1967, the Oregon Legislature expanded Oregon's Civil Rights laws. Representative Connie McCready noted that, *"...we find almost 20 years later the statutes defining fair employment practices still do not measure up to the brave words of this public policy declaration."*⁵ This new bill authorized the Oregon Labor Commissioner to initiate court suits under Oregon's Civil Rights Law. As a result, Mark A. Smith filed suit against five Oregon Corporations on charges of housing discrimination. That same year, the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments established a regional human relations commission as a means of fostering racial harmony serving all of Marion and Polk counties. Wesley Howe, executive secretary of the COG stated, *"The primary purpose of a regional human relations commission is to achieve community and individual attitudes-through persuasion-which disregard the race, religion or national origin of individuals."*⁶ This action was taken after a group of Salem area Blacks appealed to the Salem City Council for help in solving problems of racial discrimination living outside of the City limits of Salem.

The Civil Rights Movement in Oregon and its connections to current day movements, including Black Lives Matter, are highlighted in [Racing to Change](#),⁷ an exhibit created by the Oregon Black Pioneers. The Oregon Black Pioneers is a non-profit historical society headquartered in Salem dedicated to preserving and presenting the experiences of African Americans statewide. Additional local efforts include Salem-Keizer's chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who have

¹ *"Dave Robinson Heads FEPC"*, The Capital Journal, July 21, 1949, page 12.

² *"State Civil Rights Laws 15 Years Old"*, Statesman Journal, August 30, 1963, page 8.

³ *"Couple Test Oregon's Civil Rights Law"*, Statesman Journal, January 25, 1964, page 5.

⁴ *"4 Negroes Report Service Denied in Salem Tavern"* The Capital Journal, November 23, 1965, page 9.

⁵ *"Rights Extension is Voted by House."* Statesman Journal. April 5, 1967, page 6.

⁶ *"COG Seeks New Agency"* The Capital Journal, Feb. 8, 1967, page 3.


⁷ <https://oregonblackpioneers.org/racing-to-change/>, accessed October 28, 2021.

a number of active committees relating to education and race relations. Salem's NAACP facilitates an annual march on Martin Luther King Jr. Day to honor the civil rights leader's legacy.

Being Black in Oregon

The Civil Rights Movement in Oregon included positive efforts by Oregon lawmakers who pioneered equal treatment under the law. In Portland, the Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church has recently been listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its pivotal role during the Civil Rights era. The church was the site of Portland's largest public Civil Rights demonstration in 1963 after the tragic bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Alabama. In April 1968, the church served as the site of the State of Oregon's memorial service honoring the slain Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., an event attended by Senator Mark Hatfield, Governor Tom McCall, and Portland Mayor Terry Schrunk.

The significance of the Civil Rights Movement in Oregon is increased when viewed in the historical context of being Black in Oregon. Oregon's history of Black exclusion pre-dates the formation of the State of Oregon – extending back over 175 years. The concept of Black exclusion carried forward into the Oregon Constitution. Oregon was the only state that entered the Union with a clause in its constitution forbidding Black people to live here. This ideology has shaped Oregon's entire history, including that of the City of Salem. It wasn't until 2002 that the language relating to race was removed from the constitution with passage of Ballot Measure 14 in 2002.

Oregon Transportation Commission  POLICY	NUMBER TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION-05	SUPERSEDES TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION-01
	EFFECTIVE DATE OCT. 15, 1991	PAGE NUMBER 1 OF 1
	REFERENCE OREGON TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION MINUTES – OCTOBER 15, 1991	
SUBJECT NAMING HIGHWAY FACILITIES		

The following guidelines are to be applied on a case-by-case basis:

- I. The Oregon Transportation Commission generally will not name highway facilities after individuals.
- II. The Oregon Transportation Commission may elect to suspend Guideline 1 if a requester can show compliance with the following criteria:
 1. Demonstrated statewide support for naming a facility.
 2. The honored individual shall have made a lasting contribution, with a significant and historic impact on Oregon.
 3. The honored individual shall have been deceased for at least one year.
 4. The facility is long enough to merit a title, such as a bridge or tunnel more than one-half mile long, or a highway section with defined end-points which was completed as a whole.
- III. The comments of the Oregon Geographic Names Board will be solicited prior to naming any highway facility. (Any federal recognition will be contingent upon their approval.)